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To: Wisconsin Clinicians, Infection Preventionists, Local and Tribal Health Departments, and  
Laboratorians

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### Increased reports of laboratory-confirmed cases of legionellosis (Legionnaires' disease)

#### PLEASE DISTRIBUTE WIDELY

An increase in reported laboratory confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease (Ld) has been detected among Wisconsin residents, particularly among those living in counties in the Southeastern Region. Since June 1, the Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) has received reports of 51 confirmed cases of Ld, with 22 occurring among Milwaukee County residents. Case-patients' ages range from 31 to 93 years, and the median age is 58 years.

Because of the potential scope of this occurrence of Ld, we request your assistance with detecting and reporting cases of Ld to help determine possible sources of exposure to *Legionella*.

#### For Health Care Providers

We are requesting that patients who meet any of the following criteria be tested for Ld:

- Hospitalized patients with atypical pneumonia consistent with Ld (<https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/clinicians.html>),
- Immunocompromised patients with pneumonia,
- Patients with pneumonia who fail to respond to treatment with a  $\beta$ -lactam or cephalosporin antibiotic,
- Patients at risk for Ld with healthcare-associated pneumonia (pneumonia with onset  $\geq$  48 hours after admission),
- Patients with pneumonia who have a travel history (i.e., patients who have traveled away from their home within 14 days before illness onset).

The urinary antigen assay and culture of lower respiratory secretions on selective media (Buffered Charcoal Yeast Extract [BYCE] agar) are the preferred diagnostic tests for Ld. **We strongly encourage clinicians to order both *Legionella* cultures and urinary antigen tests for any patients suspected to have Ld.** Characterization of clinical isolates of *Legionella* is essential to determine linkages among clinical cases and with environmental sources.

Please note that *Legionella* will not grow on standard media used for routine respiratory cultures. Thus, *Legionella* culture must be specifically ordered for a lower respiratory specimen (e.g., sputum or bronchoalveolar lavage).

If your laboratory does not perform *Legionella* culture, specimens should immediately be sent to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) for testing. In addition, during this time of enhanced Ld surveillance, the Division of Public Health (DPH) will approve fee-exempt testing for *Legionella* (PCR and culture of lower respiratory specimens, pleural fluid, lung tissue or other normally sterile site) at the WSLH for patients meeting the criteria above who have radiographic evidence of pneumonia. To obtain approval for fee-exempt *Legionella* testing, please contact the DPH Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.

#### **For Local and Tribal Health Departments**

Investigations of clusters of Ld depend on aggressive follow-up of the case-patients' history and possible exposures to *Legionella*. The case-patient or a member of his/her family should be interviewed to determine possible sources of his/her illness **as soon as possible** following diagnosis.

Please use the expanded legionellosis hypothesis-generating questionnaire (<https://share.health.wisconsin.gov/ph/pca/CommunicableDisease/2016%20Legionellosis%20Hypothesis%20Generating%20Questionnaire.pdf>) for all interviews and re-interviews of patients with illness onset **since June 1, 2017**. After the patient interview, please enter data into the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS), complete all exposure fields, and upload a scanned copy of the questionnaire with additional exposure information into the WEDSS Filing Cabinet.

#### **For Laboratorians**

For patients with radiographic evidence of pneumonia and a positive urinary *Legionella* antigen test result, please send remaining aliquots of sputum or other lower respiratory specimens to the WSLH for *Legionella* PCR and culture as part of our enhanced surveillance efforts.

To obtain approval for fee-exempt testing of these specimens, please contact the DPH Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.

Specimens should be shipped to:

Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene  
2601 Agriculture Drive  
Madison, WI 53718  
ATTN: Bacteriology

If you have questions regarding specimen kits and shipping, please contact the WSLH Customer Service at 800-862-1013.

Thank you for your assistance in this important matter.

If you have any questions, please contact Anna Kocharian, communicable diseases epidemiologist (608-267-9004 or [anna.kocharian@wi.gov](mailto:anna.kocharian@wi.gov)) or the DPH Bureau of Communicable Diseases at 608-267-9003.